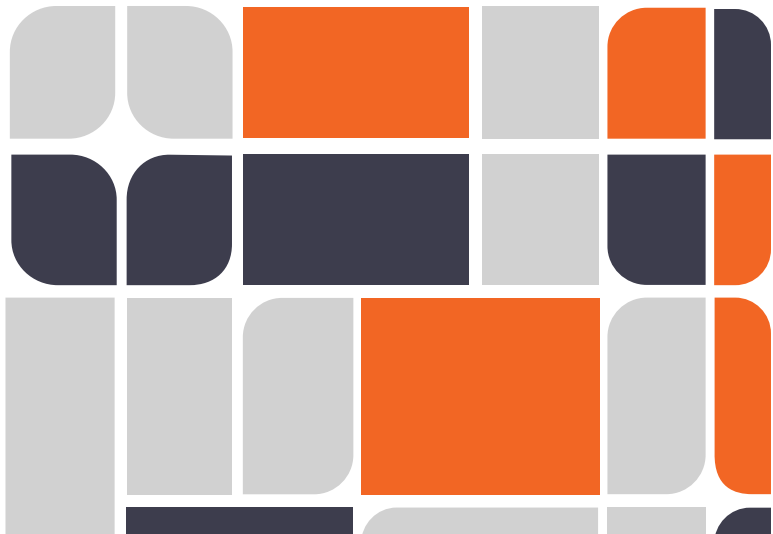




LOCAL SEARCH TRAFFIC™

Local Map Listings, Local Pay Per Click,
Local Search Engine Optimization & Local Social Media

White Paper





In a world where one click can purchase a ticket to Hong Kong, order lobster from Maine, or buy shoes from Paris, we also increasingly use the internet to find treasures in our own backyard. **The importance of local search in digital marketing continues to grow.** According to the Kelsey Group, **74 percent of internet users perform local searches.** Local business searchers are further along in the purchase cycle, demonstrating a low cost per lead and a high conversion rate. A comprehensive local search campaign uses an integrated strategy involving map listings, pay per click advertising, search engine optimization and social media efforts to **convert these solid leads into new customers.** After years of success in the industry, **Local Search Traffic**, a division of Location3 Media, presents a guide to the basics of using local search marketing to your advantage.



a division of Location3 Media, Inc.

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➔ Figure 1.1 Search Engine Results Page (SERP)

The screenshot shows a Google search for "phoenix hotels" with approximately 10,400,000 results. The page is divided into several sections:

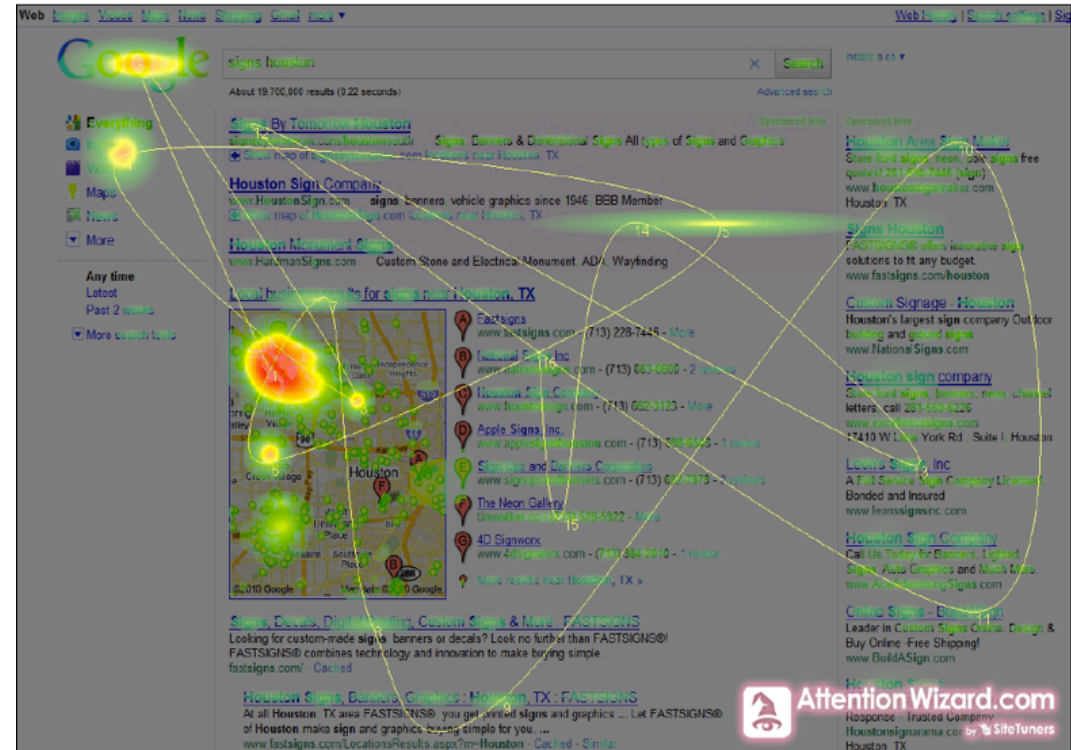
- PAID ADS:** A green callout points to the top section of results, which includes:
 - 375 Hotels in Phoenix:** An advertisement from Expedia.com with a 4.5-star rating (607 reviews) and a link to www.Expedia.com/Phoenix.
 - Phoenix Hotels:** An advertisement from hiexpress.com offering free hot breakfast and in-room WiFi, with a link to www.hiexpress.com.
 - Phoenix Hyatt Hotel:** An advertisement from Scottsdale.Hyatt.com for a Hyatt Phoenix Hotel, with a link to www.Scottsdale.Hyatt.com.
- ORGANIC LISTINGS:** A blue callout points to the middle section of results, which includes:
 - Phoenix Hotels - Compare Hotels in Phoenix and Book with Expedia:** A link to www.expedia.com for comparing 374 hotels.
 - Phoenix Hotels: Read Phoenix Hotel Reviews and Compare Prices:** A link to www.tripadvisor.com/Hotels-g31310-Phoenix_Arizona-Hotels.html.
 - Phoenix Hotels: Find Hotels in Phoenix, Arizona with Hotel Reviews:** A link to www.orbitz.com for hotel reviews.
- LOCAL MAP LISTINGS:** A red callout points to a map on the right side of the page showing various hotel locations in Phoenix, Arizona, with letters A through F marking specific points of interest.
- Additional Results:** Below the organic listings, there are more search results, including:
 - Hotel Phoenix, Phoenix Arizona Hotel, Phoenix Hotels, Downtown ...:** A link to www.hotelsancarlos.com/ for Hotel San Carlos, with 227 reviews and a place page link.
 - 50 Hotels in Phoenix:** An advertisement from Booking.com offering up to 50% savings on reservations, with a link to www.booking.com/Phoenix_Arizona.
 - Phoenix Hotels:** An advertisement from Marriott.com for 50 Phoenix Area Hotels, with a link to Marriott.com/Phoenix.
 - Crowne Plaza Phoenix:** An advertisement for Crowne Plaza Phoenix, with a link to www.CrownePlaza.com.
 - Luxury Phoenix Hotel:** An advertisement for a luxury hotel, with a link to www.LuxuryPhoenixHotel.com.

You go to Google and type in “Green Bay restaurant.” What appears on the right panel? A map of restaurant locations in Green Bay. Where did that data come from, and if you are a restaurateur in Green Bay, how do you ensure your business shows up there?

The answers to these questions are the basis for the entire local search industry.

Approximately four years ago, Google made a major change in their search engine results page by introducing a “Universal Search” system that blended listings with video, images and news results along with the sites it gathered from crawling web pages. Universal Search also accommodated the increase in searches for location-specific information. Instead of just searching “brown boots,” many people were searching “brown boots Denver.” Search engines tested this new interest trend by placing a map and local listings at the top of the results page. Heat map reports showing how users absorb a search results page implied that users paid a good deal of attention to the map listings at the top of the page.

➔ Figure 1.2 Heat map reporting demonstrates areas of high visual concentration on web pages.



This research also indicates that users interact with map listings and organic search results more frequently than the paid ads. This change prompted Google to prioritize local search to the top of the search results page, and in time most engines followed suit.

In order to populate all these local search results, engines began receiving listings from database providers. These providers sent phonebooks to third-world countries for data entry. Much of the data you see in a local search results page today is the result of this off-shore data entry. The database providers try to verify the basic listing information, but are often unable to get responses from the businesses.

Before the rise of local search, users had to enter a search term plus a geo-modifier (e.g., Denver, Bay Area, Texas) in order to get location-specific search results. Today's search algorithms take into account the IP address of the user, showing location-targeted results without the searcher requesting it. A search for just "spa" from a computer in Beverly Hills will pull up spa locations in the greater Los Angeles area along with the general information pages.

Google experimented with how many local search listings to display in order to maximize user experience. Originally, only three local search listing results were displayed as flags next to the area map. Google tried increasing local map listings to a 10-pack, but found that searchers did not like how far down the page that moved organic search results. Research indicated that local searchers wanted a selection of map listings, but also valued the organic search listings. This led to the 7-pack format, which presented seven listings at the top of

the search page. The most recent iteration of Google's local search display is called "Place Search." This format combines the organic listings with local map listings and positions the map on the right panel. There is also an option to see only local listings by clicking the "Places" link in the left-hand panel. The latest iteration personalizes local search by allowing users to select their location to see local listings in any area, not just their current location. This change puts even more emphasis on local search results by showing more robust listings with pictures, meta descriptions and review quotes.

As the importance of local search continues to grow, the importance of understanding it increases exponentially for any business owner.

Verification Process

The first step to maximizing your local search listing is to verify that your company has the rights to the listing. When local search first began it was based on a Wiki system, where anyone could change any listing. This obviously created problems with competitors hijacking each other's information and entering inaccurate data. Both Google and Bing wanted to improve the search experience for their users by allowing businesses to correct inaccuracies. The solution was to register each listing and only allow changes with authorization.

In order to claim a listing a representative of the business must log in, add the listing details, receive a PIN on a postcard or by telephone and use it to verify the listing.

In the last few years Google has developed a trusted feed process so that franchises and multiunit businesses can claim all locations at once. This is done through a corporate email verification system rather than a PIN for each location. Google started this trend hoping to make it easier for franchises to protect their information and allow them to update multiple locations at once using a bulk feed spreadsheet.

Ranking Factors

If high page position is the goal, what factors affect where your business comes up in a local search query? The answer to that question is a matter of fierce debate among local search marketers. Search engines guard their algorithms closely, and marketers can only guess at which factors carry the most weight. That said, many industry experts have studied rankings over time and developed some very educated guesses on what counts, and what marketing techniques actually hurt a listing's ranking.

The five ranking factors below are based on Local Search Traffic's research along with an annual survey of industry experts. All the ranking factors are important; the order does not indicate precedence. Additional research on ranking factors can be found at: <http://www.davidmihm.com/local-search-ranking-factors.shtml>

All industry experts can agree that claiming your listing is the very first step a business must take before starting to work on improving ranking. If you don't claim the listing, you can't control it. Just like the lotto: you've got to be in it to win it. Claiming your listing does two things. First, it lets the engine know it has accurate and updated information. Secondly, it gives you control of the listing and the ability to optimize it.

The Top 5 Ranking Factors

1. Proximity of business address to the city centroid.

Unfortunately, a very important factor is one that you cannot change. Experts agree that search engines look at the address of a business listing first to determine if it fits search criteria. Engines will define a "centroid" or exact center of the city, and base local ranking on proximity to that point. If your business is outside the imaginary line drawn around the city limits, your listing will not rank

well, especially in highly competitive situations. The exception to this is when extremely low competition is found in a rural area, in which case listings for a niche business may include surrounding areas. Researchers have seen that crowded listings (e.g., “bathing suit shop, Miami”) rely on proximity more than less competitive listings (e.g., “bathing suit shop, Fargo”). However, the rise of mobile use seems to be lessening the importance. It is still possible to achieve a high ranking without close proximity to the centroid by playing up the other factors.

2. Associating listing with proper categories.

Most major search engines provide categories to identify the basic purpose of your business. Using the pre-defined categories provides the engine with information it wants to utilize, so filling these out is highly recommended. It is important to research the most popular categories for your business; assigning your listing a commonly-used business category can improve search ranking. A good strategy is to use at least one default category, and then also create a custom category using your keywords.

3. Product/service keyword in business listing title.

It is generally agreed upon that having the product keyword in your business title is a heavy ranking factor. Obviously, it is a major advantage if your keyword

already exists in your business name. For example, if an effective keyword for the floral industry is “flowers,” Lehrer’s Flowers has a local search ranking advantage over FTD. Artificially placing a keyword in the title of your business for a local search listing is a controversial practice. It has been shown to increase search ranking, but may ultimately result in ranking penalties from search engines. Google and other engines enforce these guidelines and regulations with the intent of providing the best user experience possible.

4. Customer reviews.

Local search listings with customer reviews gain more traction in results than those without them. Search engines value user interaction and having user reviews on the listing can help improve ranking. For ranking purposes, it does not matter if the reviews are positive or negative (review monitoring and responses will be addressed later in this paper). By all means encourage customer reviews, but do not post your own reviews, as this is a violation of search engine guidelines.

5. Product/service keywords in listing description.

The description form for your listing is an excellent place to include your keywords, especially if they are not in your business title. Be sure to take advantage of this form to give potential customers more information and utilize

the opportunity to include keywords that help your search ranking results. As with most optimization techniques, do not overstuff the keywords into the listing, as the engines can penalize the listing for trying to game the system.

With the rollout of Google's "Place Search" traditional search engine optimization efforts will also have an impact on ranking, but only time and testing will determine the extent of the influence.

Optimizing a Listing

Armed with the knowledge of which aspects help your listing, you can then optimize the content to improve search ranking. Along with the top five above, the panel of experts also identified photos, having a local area code as the page's primary phone number and associating video with the listing as additional factors that play significant roles.

The first step to optimization is researching and identifying keywords. This is a complex process that utilizes keyword research tools and website analytics. Once the listing is claimed and the keywords are identified, the optimization process can begin. After ensuring all the information is correct, optimize the listing by appropriately inserting the keywords throughout the listing text.

The next step is to add relevant and enticing photographs, informative and entertaining videos, social media links and coupons or special offers. All of this enriched content is seen favorably by search engines.

The listing should then be customized for all the different search channels. This is a time consuming process, and one that benefits from an expert understanding of how each channel operates. Optimization is not a one-time process. In order to maintain ranking, the listing must be updated frequently with fresh content.

Optimizing an International Listing

If your franchise has international locations, there are additional considerations in optimizing your local search listing. All of the above optimization points hold true for international listings, but the difference comes in creating the text for the listing. It is important to not just translate the listing word-for-word into the local language, as there may be variances in cultural meanings and context. Be sure to have a native speaker review the listing to ensure the translation gets the intended meaning across, not just the literal words. This holds true even for English-speaking countries, as some terms may vary with dialect.

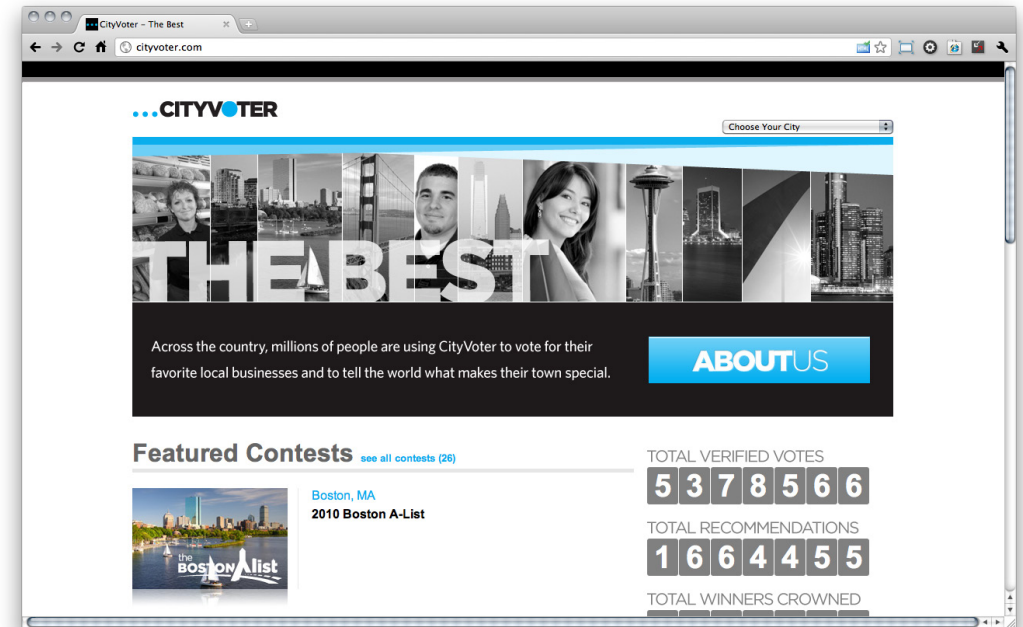
Citations

Another important factor in making it to the top of the local listings is citations. Citations are mentions of your business name and address on other websites, with or without a link to your own site. Some examples of potential citations include an online yellow pages directory, a local chamber of commerce site or an annual report on local businesses.

We can be fairly certain that the Google algorithm awards higher ranking based on the quality and quantity of your site's citations. However, the exact preferences change all the time and require a constant and ongoing process to evaluate how citations improve ranking.

You can choose to be proactive about increasing citations. Submitting a listing to both major and small local search channels increases web citations. Another in-depth strategy is to investigate the current listings found at the top of the page, see where they are drawn from and then submit your listing to those sites as well. Examples of channels include Local.com, Insider Pages, Superpages and CityVoter.

➔ **Figure 1.3** CityVoter is one resource for increasing citations in your map listings.



Reporting and Measurement

As with any marketing effort, tracking return on investment for local search is half the battle. web analytics is a key component in tracking local search performance. Using Google Analytics, it is possible to create custom segments that allow unique measurements of all traffic from each map listing. Map listing traffic is organic, but if a tag is applied to a listing in the manual submission

process, that tag allows the traffic from a specific listing to be pulled out of the general stream of site traffic. With a certain amount of expertise, this can be done to such a detailed level that an analyst could separate the orders from a single pizza franchise's local map listing out of the entire national chain's daily online orders.

Local Search Traffic offers a proprietary reporting suite that catalogues, analyzes and measures incoming local traffic. The suite consists of Position Agent, Accuracy Agent, and an analytics report. Position Agent provides a detailed look into location-specific performance, showing position trends for your keywords. At the beginning of an analysis period for a company, the current organic search ranking is noted. For a large franchise, each location's position is documented. Monitoring tracks advances (or declines) in search position over periods of time and can be incredibly useful to see how optimization techniques are working. It also helps a large franchise to clearly see which of their locations are searched for most frequently. Accuracy Agent is used to ensure listings are 100 percent correct. By comparing verified client data against current search results, any inaccuracies across the local search landscape are proactively identified and adjusted. Analytics reports provide data on ROI specific to map listing efforts by recording traffic sources, keyword performance and conversions.

Some marketing firms will track calls from the local search listing as part of the reporting process, but we do not recommend that course of action. Tracking calls requires the use of a phone number that is different from your main business number. When a listing is submitted with a business phone number, search engines crawl the web looking for citations to confirm that number. If they find other phone numbers associated with the business, the listing will not rank as well. Using separate call tracking phone numbers breaks the circle of consistent data and has a negative impact on a listing's performance.

Sponsored Placements

All of the methods and techniques discussed above are based on maximizing your listing's potential in organic search listings for free. There are upgrade options available if you are willing to make an investment to improve your ranking. This may be necessary if you cannot achieve your desired ranking organically. For example, your proximity to city center is low and no amount of optimization will push your listing up in the rankings. Depending on the channel, upgrade options can include highlighting a phone number, purchasing a wider geographic display for the ad or even buying the top spot.

Many channels offer upgrade options, but one popular choice is Google Tags.

These yellow markers allow business owners to promote aspects of their businesses including coupons, photos or special offers. It does not affect search results, but does improve the user experience with your listing and can entice them to visit your location. Google also offers Google Boost, an easy way to advertise in conjunction with free business listings. This option is currently only available in select cities but will be rolled out to additional markets over time.

Google also recently began beta testing for a sponsored map icons program. Location3 Media's Local Search Traffic division was invited to participate in the testing and share feedback. As part of Google's efforts to provide useful and relevant information, the sponsored map icons allow companies with multiple locations and well-known brands to include their logos directly on Google Maps, replacing the default icons that currently appear when users zoom in to an area. Companies with recognizable logos will most likely benefit from users being able to pick out their location when browsing Google Maps.

Review Monitoring

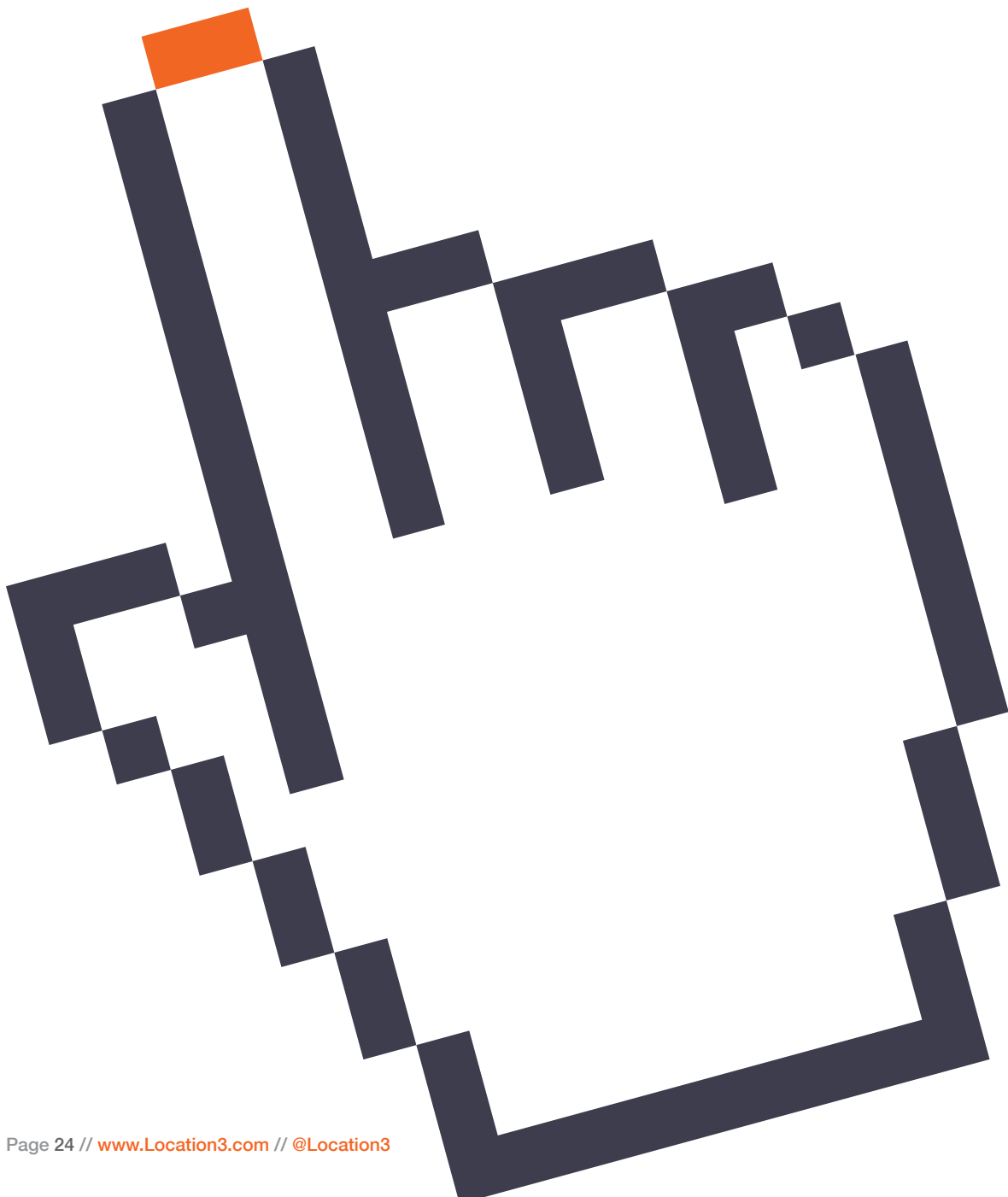
Another important aspect of your local search listing is the customer-submitted reviews of your product or service. The importance of reviews to customer behavior continues to grow. According to Digital World, Digital Life, 63 percent

of adult internet users research a product or service online before purchasing it. Seven in ten who read reviews share them with friends, family and colleagues (Deloitte & Touche). Also, Compete.com states that traffic to the top ten review sites grew an average 158 percent last year. The bottom line is consumers today rarely buy something without considering the product reviews.

With that in mind, do you know what the reviews on your local search listing say about your company? Review monitoring is a vital aspect of managing a local search listing. This can be a time-consuming process and you may want to outsource it for effective and timely management.

Closely monitoring popular consumer review sites allows for spam filtration and quick response time. Responding quickly to both negative and positive reviews shows that your brand cares about its customers and engages them in an ongoing conversation that builds relationships and brand loyalty.

“As the importance of local search continues to grow, the importance of understanding it increases exponentially for any business owner.”




Local Pay Per Click 02

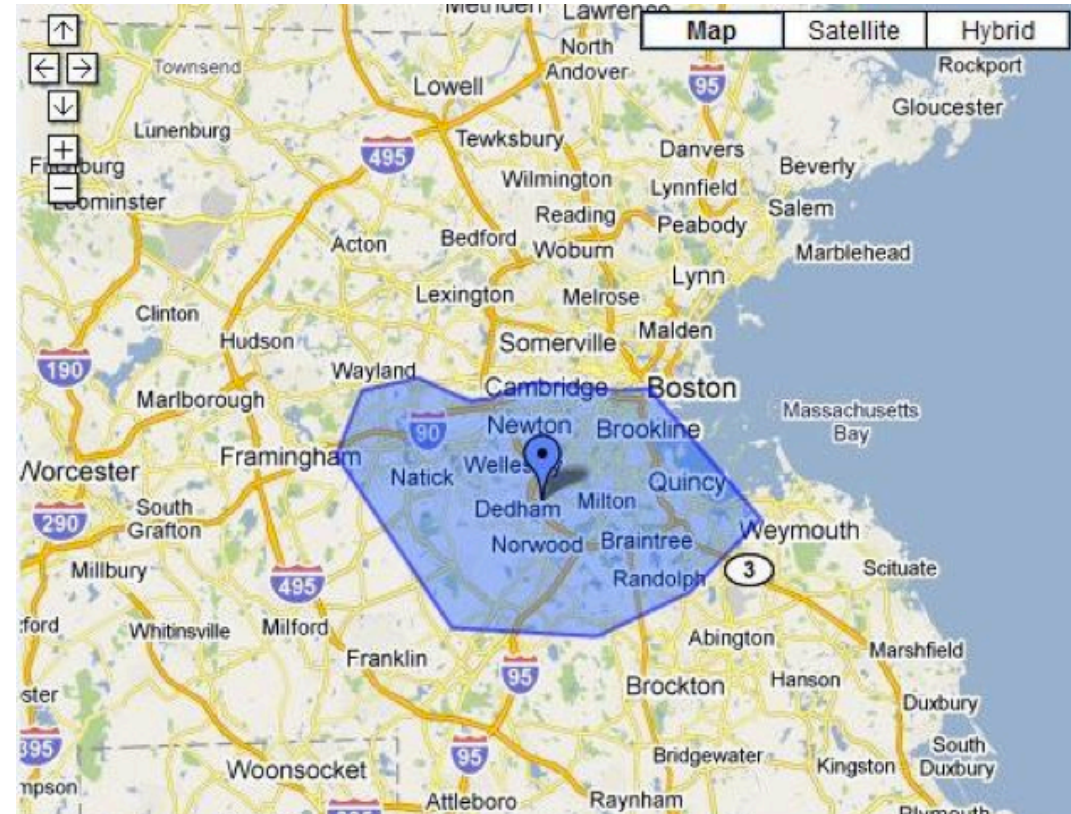
Local pay per click (PPC) advertising is a fast-growing and cost effective form of internet marketing. It allows you to reach the customers who are actively searching for your products and services and quantify return on investment in real time. Google, Yahoo!, Bing and AOL are the leading PPC search engines and there are numerous secondary and niche engines as well. A well executed local PPC campaign involves the integration of strategic targeting, ad copy, extensive keyword research, landing page optimization, indentifying relevant distribution channels and detailed tracking.

Targeting

As mentioned earlier, search engine algorithms take into account the IP address of the user, showing location-targeted results without the searcher requesting it. This is known as targeting and taking advantage of it will help you spend your ad dollars wisely. Bing and Google allow ad campaigns to be specifically targeted

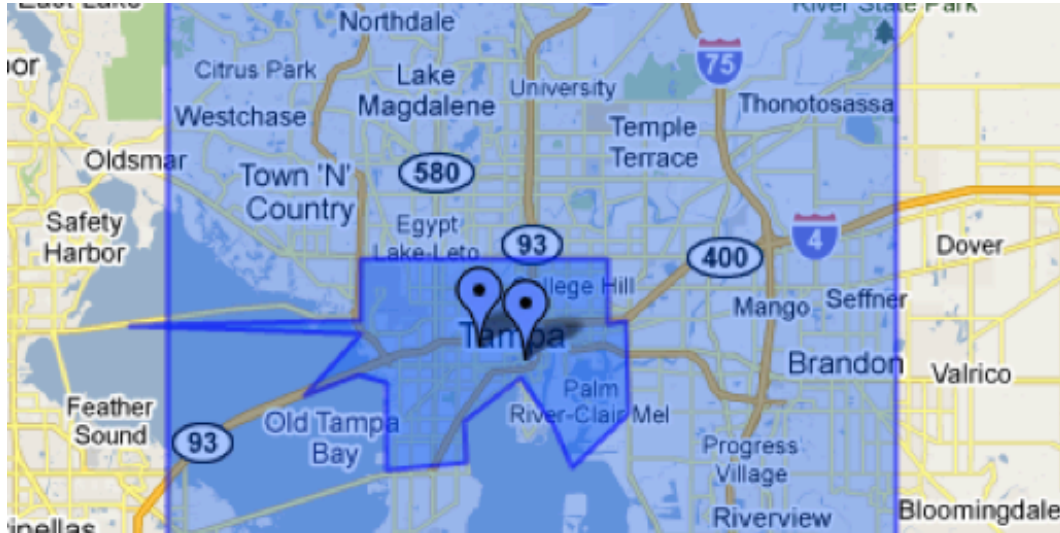
to a geographic area. Business owners can target an area designated by their corporate office or areas that have historically generated high sales. The areas can be defined by state, metro area, city or even a custom sales area.

 **Figure 2.1** A targeted custom sales area.



There are some additional considerations to targeting if your business is part of a franchise or multiunit brand. Overlapping targeting in multiple accounts is a violation of search engine advertising policies, so you will have to coordinate targeting with other locations in the vicinity. Even if two franchise locations use different domain names they are not allowed to have overlapping targeting. Additionally, it is not in the franchisees' best interests to overlap targeting, as it creates competition between the two locations and dilutes the brand power of the parent company. If two franchise locations are very close together, they may consider advertising together to maximize ad spend.

➔ Figure 2.2 An example of overlapping targeting.



Ad Copy

A vital aspect of a local pay per click campaign is creating ad copy that speaks to the local consumer. Using location-specific keywords in the title, ad copy and display URL maximizes your ad spend. There are also a variety of additional features available from Google to help make your ad location-specific. Targeting a city or metro area will make the name of the area appear below your ad and implementing location extensions shows your full address below the ad. You can also apply phone extensions to show a click-to-call number on mobile devices so a searcher can easily contact you.

➔ Figure 2.3 Optimized local advertisements.

Restaurant Deals

Save 50-90% on Top-Rated **Denver Restaurants**. Tasty Deals Every Day!
www.Groupon.com/Denver
Denver, CO
- Call: 1-954-247-8798

Gym Flint MI

Get In, Get Out, Get Fit this Summer.
Try Us Free For 7 Days!
www.SnapFitness/Flint
G-1381 W. Bristol Rd., Flint, MI

Keywords

Geographically targeted keywords are another important aspect of an effective PPC campaign. Using a combination of both geo-modified and non geo-modified keywords generates the best results. Geo-modified keywords like “New York pizza” or “Dayton plumber” allow your ad to be visible to searchers outside your targeted area because Google recognizes the geographic intent of your search. Since IP address targeting is not foolproof and not all potential customers are in your area when trying to find your business, using geo-modified keywords helps customers find you. However, it is also important to include keywords that are not geo-modified as well so local searchers using broad terms (e.g., pizza, plumber) in your area can find your business. The rollout of Google Places makes this mixture even more important. Combining both geo-modified and broad keywords ensures that your ad is reaching the maximum number of potential customers.

Landing Pages

Local business searchers are further along in the purchase cycle; when an individual is searching for a specific service in their area, they are typically more ready to buy. Help them complete the sale with an effective landing page.

Your contact information should be front and center, with the physical address, website and phone number. Content on the landing page needs to be relevant to the advertisement and contain the same keywords as the ad. If you are advertising with other locations the landing page should contain information for all locations.

Engine Networks

Google and Bing both have extensive networks of sites that your ads can appear on through network targeting. Using these networks with proper targeting can expand your local advertising reach by allowing your ads to appear on maps.google.com, ask.com, whitepages.com and more.

Tracking

Tracking the results of your investment is imperative and there are several ways to track a local PPC campaign. The first method is tracking phone calls. Many companies allow you to use a phone number assigned specifically to your campaign. This allows you to see how many people are calling your location after clicking on the ad, and different companies offer different levels of reporting. This is exclusive to PPC advertising. It is a different method than the

call tracking we advised against in the Local Map section. A more robust option is conversion tracking, which allows you to see how many people are taking action on your site. Both Google and Bing offer free conversion tracking code with their PPC services. Conversion tracking can measure almost anything on your site, including form completions, coupon downloads, email forms and of course, actual sales. The next step is also implementing an analytics package that tracks how customers interact with your website. Google provides an excellent free analytics package that works hand-in-hand with its advertising platform AdWords.

Strategy

If you are a part of a franchise or multiunit brand you most likely will have national and local campaigns working simultaneously to create a brand presence and capture customers on the internet. Make sure your strategies are working together and not against each other. Set clear ground rules and objectives for each and you will have a strong and effective presence in all of your markets.

“ A vital aspect of a local pay per click campaign is creating ad copy that speaks to the local consumer. ”

Local Search Engine Optimization
03



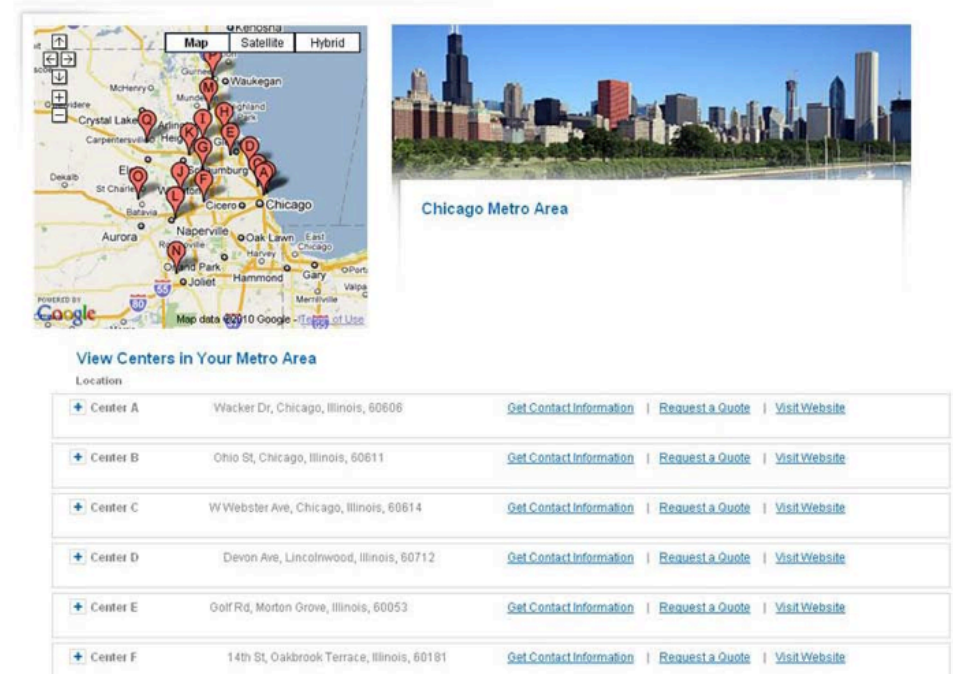
Search engine optimization (SEO) is the practice of developing, reorganizing and link building for a website so that it achieves top position on organic search listings. Searchers rarely venture past the first or second page of search results; by employing a comprehensive SEO campaign you can raise your website's positioning and subsequently increase traffic, exposure, leads and sales. There are a variety of strategies you can employ to optimize your local web pages.

Metro Pages

Creating a metro page for a group of stores is a common and effective approach to improve search engine ranking. Let's say there are a number of franchise locations in a metro area—10 Windy City Pizza branches in a 20 mile radius in Chicago. Spending money on optimizing each branch's website is counterproductive, as they will compete with each other for ranking on the same search terms ("Chicago pizza"). When metro pages do not exist, one franchise

may begin to outrank the others in search results and corporate headquarters may receive complaints from the other owners. Instead, the stores can band together to create and optimize one metro page that lists all the locations. Once customers land on that page, they can choose which location is most convenient. This eliminates competition between individual stores and allows for a more manageable SEO strategy. This strategy is only recommended if there is a high density of franchise locations in a particular area.

➔ Figure 3.1 A sample metro page.



Chicago Metro Area

| View Centers in Your Metro Area | | |
|---------------------------------|--|---|
| Location | | |
| Center A | Wacker Dr, Chicago, Illinois, 60606 | Get Contact Information Request a Quote Visit Website |
| Center B | Ohio St, Chicago, Illinois, 60611 | Get Contact Information Request a Quote Visit Website |
| Center C | W Webster Ave, Chicago, Illinois, 60614 | Get Contact Information Request a Quote Visit Website |
| Center D | Devon Ave, Lincolnwood, Illinois, 60712 | Get Contact Information Request a Quote Visit Website |
| Center E | Golf Rd, Morton Grove, Illinois, 60053 | Get Contact Information Request a Quote Visit Website |
| Center F | 14th St, Oakbrook Terrace, Illinois, 60181 | Get Contact Information Request a Quote Visit Website |

When creating a metro page, it is important to utilize all of the SEO opportunities. Title tags, H1 title, content, URLs and meta descriptions should all contain the keywords “Chicago pizza” or a close variation that makes sense for that element. The internal linking structure should be optimized, and metro pages should ideally be within a few clicks from the domain’s index page. All metro pages must be included in both the HTML and XML sitemaps with the metro term (in our example, that term is “Chicago”). The code on the site should be easily accessed and indexed by search engines—meaning it should not overuse Flash and images or misuse JavaScript. The metro site should link to each location, and individual stores can personalize their own site (assuming the franchise allows it). It is highly recommended to have unique content for each location site. Using a template or having duplicate information can have a negative impact on organic rankings.

Choosing the targeted keywords is a crucial aspect of a successful metro page. Google AdWords allows you to view keyword search volume to select both primary and secondary terms. In the Chicago Windy City Pizza example, the term with the most traffic might be “Chicago pizza,” as opposed to “pizza in Chicago” or “Chicago pizza restaurants.” So that would be the primary term to use. Secondary terms may be “pizza specials,” “pizza deals” or “cheap pizza.” Utilize these secondary terms in the title tags if possible and also throughout the

content on the page.

Your site gains a higher search ranking when other relevant websites link to it. Link building is the process of attracting other sites to place your link on their site, ideally through providing quality content in blogs and articles. Link building for metro pages is much more efficient than a corporation trying to build links to each individual franchise page. Also, the positive effect of these links trickle down to individual location pages.

➔ **Figure 3.2** An example of a blog for metro link building.



Individual Location Pages

Once the metro page has been established, it is also important to optimize the individual location pages. Use the same optimization techniques as outlined for the metro page, with a focus on making the content unique. Individualized content is a major factor for increasing search ranking. Focus on the unique selling points for your location (e.g., proximity to public transit, special deals, free delivery, etc.)

The most difficult part of optimizing an individual location page is choosing a geo-targeted term that gets traffic, but does not compete with the metro page for ranking. The Windy City Pizza location in the Lincoln Park neighborhood cannot use the same term as the metro page (“Chicago pizza”), but it can use “Lincoln Park pizza.” Unfortunately, at this level, the geo-modified keywords most likely won’t present data in Google AdWords as the exact traffic will be limited. On the other hand, the visits a page does receive from these search terms will be highly qualified and likely to convert.

Corporate headquarters are challenged by the prospect of link building for all of their franchise locations, as it is an incredibly time-intensive process. It is far better for corporate to link build for metro sites, and individual stores to work

on their own link building. Often the most quality links are the most local ones. An individual franchise can try building links to their site by reaching out to affiliates, local relationships or chambers of commerce. A more time-consuming, but helpful method is to contribute content to other local blogs or websites. For instance, if a Chicago enthusiast runs a blog covering all things about the city, they might be willing to accept a guest post about how the local Windy City Pizza is hosting an event to raise money for a local charity. Also, that local charity would probably be willing to post a link on their site in thanks for that Windy City Pizza store’s support.

There are advantages and disadvantages to choosing a unique domain for your individual franchise location. In general, if a franchise owner is not willing to spend time and energy building out links and creating content, it is best to piggyback on the corporate URL instead of creating a unique one (e.g., www.windycitypizza.com/lincolnpark versus www.windycitypizzalincolnpark.com). The benefit of a unique domain is being able to put the location-specific keywords in the URL (domain is one of the highest impact factors in search engine ranking). Also, if multiple stores in an area each have their own URLs, it is possible to have multiple locations show up for one search query. However, the downside to creating a unique domain is losing all the benefits from the main business domain. All of the backlinks, content, pages and SEO maximization

on the corporate website carry significant weight in search results and it is best practice to take advantage of that as a franchise owner.

“ Your site gains a higher search ranking when other relevant websites link to it. Link building is the process of attracting other sites to place your link on their site, ideally through providing quality content in blogs and articles . . . Also, the positive effect of these links trickle down to individual location pages. ”



Including social media in your local search campaign can help boost local visibility and improve customer retention. There are a variety of ways to connect with communities, start conversations and engage potential and current customers through social media. Whether you're using Google Maps, blogs, check-in services or Facebook Places, the most important thing to remember is that social media is all about conversation.

Google Maps

An easy first step to use social media in local search advertising comes when you are creating a custom map listing. As mentioned in the Local Map Listing content optimization section, having rich content in the map listing leads to higher organic search engine results, and a better experience for your potential customer. Be sure to include links to your company's Facebook and Twitter accounts. Allowing the customer to engage with your company in the same way they communicate with their friends builds brand loyalty and online conversation about your products or services.

As previously discussed, it is also important to encourage reviews from your customers.

Think about the money and time you invest in focus groups and market research. By encouraging reviews from your customers, you receive information on their likes and dislikes, which branches have the best customer service and what areas need improvement, all for free.

Worried about airing dirty laundry? Don't be. If someone has a negative experience with your organization they are going to tell people about it. If they do it in a format you are actively monitoring, you have the opportunity to respond to it. Carefully crafted responses to individual reviews show your company's commitment to caring about their customers. In responding to the negative review, offer to right the situation, apologize for the bad experience and express your desire to keep them as a customer. By engaging in the conversation, you maintain a voice in the public perception of your organization.

This holds true for responding to positive reviews as well. Thanking customers for sharing their good experience with your company encourages engagement and increases customer loyalty. Monitoring customer reviews also allows you to delete spam posts that dilute your messaging.

➔ **Figure 4.1** A review posted on a map listing and an example of a good response.

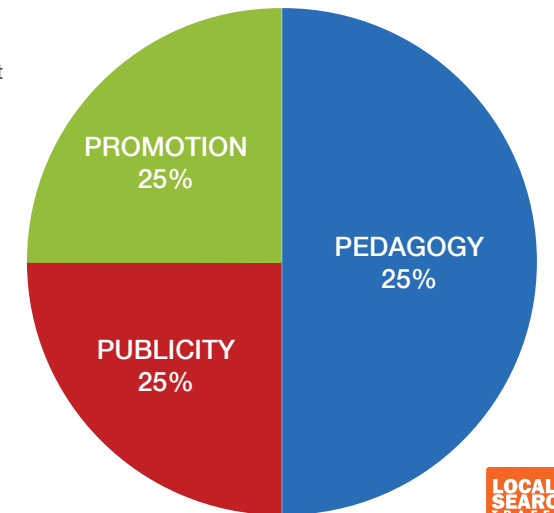


How do you monitor for these customer reviews? While there are numerous third-party tools that scan the web for mentions of your brand name, monitoring must also be done manually. Monitoring software (e.g., Scout Labs, Radian6, Techrigy) can pull results from sources with an RSS feed. Unfortunately, most customer review sites do not provide an RSS feed of new reviews and ratings. Google Maps pulls in reviews from a variety of review sites, but not all of them. Therefore, you must monitor Google Maps and other review sites manually, and respond on each channel separately.

Local-focused Blog

Creating a blog for each individual location or metro area can help increase your presence in local search listings. Host the blog on your site, so that the traffic and link weight goes to your domain. When creating content for the blog, use the SEO geo-modified keywords discussed in the SEO section. This will help the blog posts appear in organic search results when people search for your product or related topics with localized search terms. The blog should be updated frequently; it not only improves reader experience, but also helps improve search ranking because the engines value fresh content. As with all your social media efforts, the blog should encourage customers, employees and the community to participate in the conversation. All blog topics should focus on the three “P”s of best-practice blogging: pedagogy, promotion and publicity.

➔ **Figure 4.2** Blog content should be 5 percent pedagogy (educational information, how-to articles), 25 percent promotion (coupons, discounts, etc.) and 25 percent publicity (press releases, events, company culture).



Pedagogy: Writing blog posts related to your industry helps show the depth of your expertise and can promote the general visibility of your trade. These posts do not have to discuss your particular brand at all. In fact, having blog posts that are strictly informational without a mention of your brand start more conversations than a sales pitch. For example, if you are a signage company, a blog post on “10 Signage Tips for Event Registrations” may come up when someone searches “registration signs.” Establishing yourself as a resource for this information can make you a go-to source for the press and other bloggers.

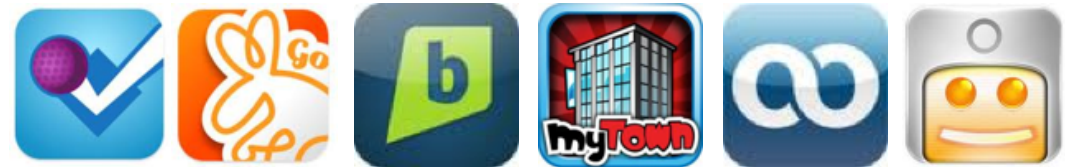
Promotion: Blog posts are also great tools to give searchers an incentive to visit your physical location. Promote your store by providing coupons, announcing in-store sales or posting contests on the blog to drive readers into your physical locations.

Publicity: Localized blogs are also an ideal place to generate publicity about your company. Introduce new products or services, announce local events and highlight successful projects, all in your own unique voice. A well executed, comprehensive blog can be a wealth of information for your customers, providing extensive resources related to your industry.

Check-in Services

Check-in services are mobile web applications that allow users to essentially register at locations as they visit them, see who else is at the venue and share activity with friends. Some of the most popular services are Foursquare, Gowalla and Brightkite. It is important for each location of your company to claim your venue on these apps and keep the information up-to-date. The process for claiming a listing is very similar to claiming an online map listing, but does not require a PIN; business owners just visit the site and register as the company. Since users on the sites are allowed to submit venues, it is a good idea to check them periodically to correct any misinformation. You can persuade customers to visit your location by offering coupons or incentives for users who check in frequently.

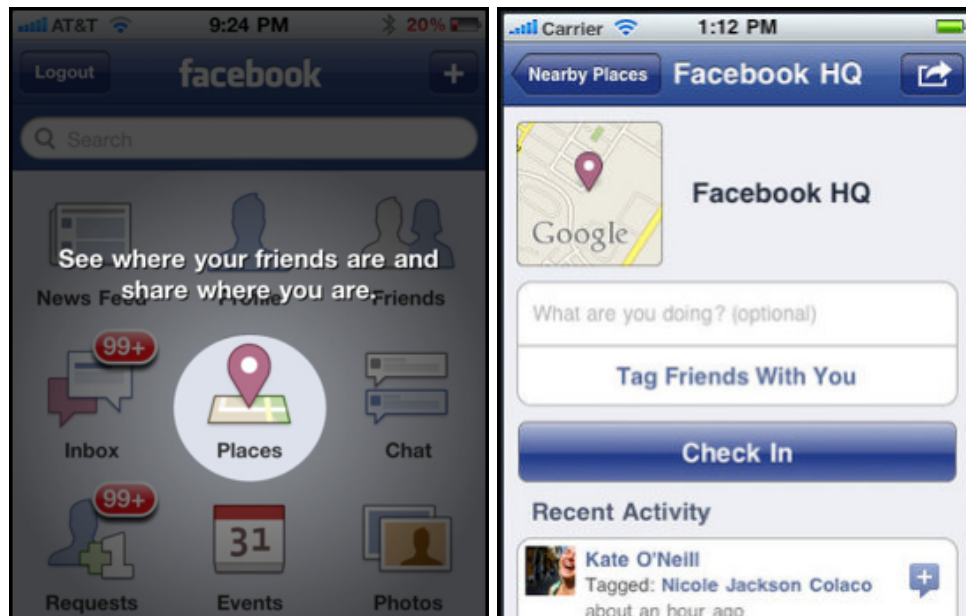
➔ **Figure 4.3** Check-in Services, First Row: Foursquare, Gowalla, Brightkite
Second Row: MyTown, Loopt, SCVNGR



Facebook Places

In August, Facebook launched a “Places” feature that is similar to the other check-in services and added Facebook Deals in early November as a way to offer specials, much like Foursquare. Since Facebook has a larger potential audience than the other apps, it may prove to be a valuable social media tool. To engage with it, add your locations to the feature and claim the listings—a process that requires you to submit some official information to verify your relationship—then encourage customers to check in via Places. As people check in to your location, their activity is broadcast to their friends, which spreads the word about your brand.

➔ Figure 4.4 Facebook Places on iPhone



Facebook Deals allows businesses to offer four types of specials—individual, friend, loyalty or charity—for users that check in via Places. Individual locations can somewhat easily publish these deals through their Places page online, but it’s not so simple for larger companies with multiple locations. Since this is a somewhat new endeavor, only time will tell if that audience is as engaged and the deals as successful as on Foursquare.

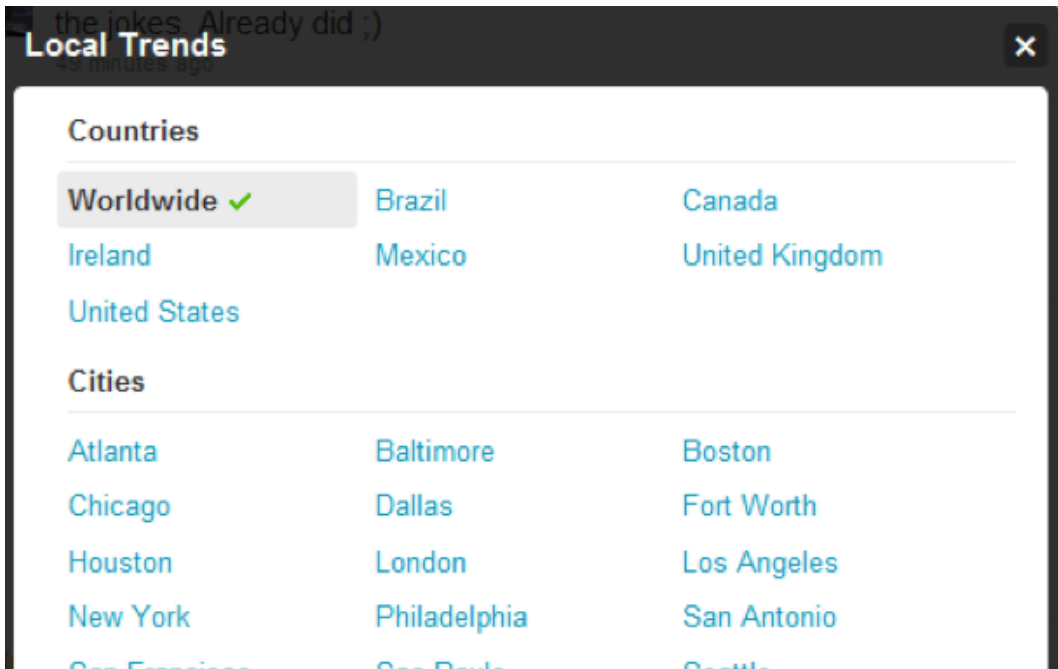
Twitter Local Trends

Twitter Local is a tool that takes a location, postal code or a state, together with a mile radius, and spits out an RSS or XML feed with tweets from that area. It can be valuable to monitor hot topics and potential customers in a specific geographic area. It allows local businesses to understand community attitudes, segment their audience and hone in on their target market for higher-quality Twitter followers. Businesses can also monitor what customers are saying about their competition. Currently, Twitter Local Trends is only available for larger cities and entire countries.

➔ Figure 4.5 Facebook Deals



➔ Figure 4.6 Locations and cities with access to Twitter Local Trends.



“ Allowing the customer to engage with your company in the same way they communicate with their friends builds brand loyalty and online conversation about your products or services. ”

Summary 05

The information and pointers above are only scratching the surface of the local search industry. Developing an integrated strategy for local map listings, PPC, SEO and social media efforts is a multi-faceted and complex undertaking. If your company has not invested time or energy into local search, it could be a huge growth area.

Want to learn more? Feel free to contact us at any time:

Location3 Media

720-881-8510

info@localsearchwhitepaper.com

Resources & Links 06



David Mihm

<http://www.davidmihm.com/local-search-ranking-factors.shtml>



ComScore

<http://www.comscore.com/>



Heat Map Tools

<http://attentionwizard.com/aw/>



Google Maps Reviews:

<http://www.google.com/support/forum/p/Places/thread?tid=1e93330052620255&hl=en>

»» Foursquare:

www.foursquare.com

»» Facebook Places:

<http://www.facebook.com/places/>

»» Twitter Local Trends:

<http://blog.twitter.com/2010/01/now-trending-local-trends.html>

»» Kelsey Group:

<http://www.kelseygroup.com>

About the Authors 07

»» Andrew Beckman, CEO

As CEO of Location3 Media, Andrew (@andrew_beckman) oversees the strategic direction and business growth and provides insight into new marketing trends and technologies.

Prior to establishing Location3 in 1999, Andrew was an international sales manager for DoubleClick, where he helped to open international locations and train sales staff on U.S. search marketing principles.

Andrew sits on the Search Marketing Council and ECHO Committee for DMA. He has delivered rousing speeches at numerous conferences and is frequently published in industry journals. Andrew graduated from the University of

Maryland in 1996 with a bachelor's degree in international business.

Alex Porter, President

As president, Alex Porter (@porter32) forges seamless relations between Location3 Media and prospective clients, and oversees the day-to-day operations of the entire company. Alex is an active member of the AMA Colorado chapter and New Denver Ad Club Board.

Prior to joining Location3 in 2003, Alex was an associate at Cooks Associate, a boutique executive recruiting firm in Boulder, CO. He graduated from the University of Maryland with a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's in kinesiology with a focus on sports psychology.

Erik Whaley, Director, Local Search Traffic

Director Erik Whaley (@localsearcherik) oversees the growing Local Search Traffic division, working with clients to develop comprehensive local search marketing programs and ensuring the highest performance of their campaigns. Erik was integral in establishing LST in 2007, and has since helped to refine offerings and build a full team of dedicated professionals.

Erik has been with Location3 since 2005. Prior to building out LST, he was account supervisor for the PPC department, overseeing the campaign management team and handling accounts totaling \$2.4 million across several verticals. Erik underwent extensive training in Google Analytics at their headquarters, is GAP and ClickTracks Analytics Professional certified. Erik graduated from the University of Colorado with a bachelor's degree in marketing and another in music production.

Anne Matkowski, Program Manager

Anne Matkowski is the program manager for Local Search Traffic, Location3 Media's division focused on local search marketing. Anne oversees the local map listings and local PPC programs, helping to manage and organize data, develop keyword lists and ad copy for each location, develop distribution plans and organize geo-targeting strategies. Additionally, Anne oversees the tracking and reporting for these local search programs, which rely on Google Analytics for the majority of reporting metrics.

Anne is a Google AdWords Professional, Yahoo! Search Marketing Ambassador, Microsoft adCenter member and she received her Google Analytics Individual

Qualification in July of 2009. Anne joined Location3 Media in 2006.

Tarla Cummings, SEO Manager

Tarla (@tarla) oversees the growing SEO department and formulates all SEO management programs, organizing keyword research, site structure changes, content development and link building efforts.

Prior to joining Location3 Media, she was a senior account manager at MySpace, where she handled one of the largest key sales accounts in MySpace history. Tarla brings to Location3 an advanced knowledge of social media networks, and has spoken at several SMX conferences on the both social media and SEO topics. Tarla graduated from Loyola Marymount University in 2003 with a bachelor's degree in vocal performance, which she currently puts to use in a Motown/Funk cover band.

Angie Pascale, Communications Manager

Angie Pascale (@angiepascale) oversees internal communications for Location3 Media, and social media programs for Location3's clients. This dual role involves a number of responsibilities, including public and social media relations,

copywriting and editing, philanthropic endeavors and strategic planning of social media programs and conversations. Regardless of the medium—ink, pixels, smoke signals or spoken words—she draws on a creative understanding of the English language to generate awareness and engagement for Location3 Media and its clients.

Prior to joining Location3 in 2006, Angie was an account executive at Marich Communications, a literary, entertainment and consumer products publicity firm based in Los Angeles. Angie is an active member on the NDAC social media committee and Ignite Denver planning committee. She graduated from Penn State University with a bachelor's degree in English.

About Location3 Media 08

Location3 Media (@Location3) is a digital marketing agency providing innovative online strategies. We employ a variety of online media and creative techniques to develop integrated programs that increase exposure, generate traffic, improve user experience, initiate engagement, increase conversations and increase return for you.

Our knowledgeable, experienced staff don't just work for the weekends—we truly geek out on this stuff. We're passionate about search, social and creative marketing and it shows in the innovative strategies we use and the results we get for you.



LOCAL SEARCH TRAFFIC™

Local Map Listings, Local Pay Per Click,
Local Search Engine Optimization & Local Social Media

White Paper

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